HORACE AND THE SPIRIT OF COMEDY[1]

I

THE START

IN HIS keen-cutting "Essay on Comedy," George Meredith revealed to his generation and to all time, so long as man has still the power to laugh, the essence of the Comic Spirit. He wisely attempts no absolute definition of what he has perceived. If the Comic Spirit could be caught and catalogued it would lose its fluttering life, like a butterfly pressed between glass plates. The highest reaches of the spirit are attained by intuition. Reason, not sentiment alone, is the path to them, but there comes a final plunge, or rather soaring, into an air that reason cannot breathe. "If you ask me," says St. Augustine, "I know not. If you ask me not, I know." A complete proof of the existence of God would leave God out, for the concepts of our mind would then envelop Him. So it is with the Comic Spirit.

And yet we may approach part way, as in the Neoplatonist's scaling of the divine heights, with some positive steps along the *via negationis*. The laughter of the Comic Spirit is gentle and humble. It has no tinge of irony or derision or indignation. It utters no malediction, and applies no flail of chastisement. It judges not, else it is judged. It forgives

[1] A course of three public lectures delivered on the Sharp Foundation of the Rice Institute, January 12, 13, and 14, 1937, by Edward Kennard Rand, Ph.D., Litt.D., LL.D., Pope Professor of Latin, and Honorary Curator of Manuscripts, at Harvard University.

those who know not what they do. And yet is none the less keen. It is not the earnestness of a moralist who stirs the hearts of sinners. It exposes its objects to the scorching light of ridicule, not for ridicule's sake, but because they for their egotism—that deadliest of the seven sins—are already basking in the ridiculous, unaware of the cloud of invisible sprites, the comic imps, that perch on head and shoulders. The Spirit of Comedy is no foe of the imagination, or romance, or poetry, or piety; only when the dreamer, the prophet, or the priest acts with a proud complacency in his part, does it look wonderingly at him with "a slim, feasting smile." In that high region in which the mind of Meredith dwelt, where lyric intensity and intellect are fused, the sunlight of Comedy dispels all mists of sentimentality and self-esteem.

Meredith's heroes in the history of human letters, his banqueters at the feast where only the rarest vintage of merriment is served, are among the ancients Aristophanes, Menander, and Terence. In Terence, as in his master, he finds "amenity that is like Elysian speech, equable and ever gracious; like the face of the Andrian's young sister:

adeo modesto, adeo venusto, ut nil supra."

Then come Chaucer, Molière, Goldoni (who, indeed, is Terence in Italian), Shakespeare, Congreve (who is Terence in English), Rabelais, Pope, Cervantes, Voltaire. Some writers in prose are invited to the feast, among them Fielding, Goldsmith, Miss Austen, Lamb. Meredith hardly intended a complete Social Register for Comedy. Several names of worthy guests, some ancient, some modern, come at once to the mind. To speak of no others, must Horace be left without, to sing what was called a "closed-door" serenade, "exposed to the rains of heaven"?[1]

[1] Horace is mentioned only once by Meredith, when he notes that Molière follows one of the precepts laid down in *The Art of Poetry* (ll. 156-7).

Meredith remarks that a simple bourgeois circle will not furnish material for the comic poet and that "cultivated men and women, who do not skim the cream of life, and are attached to the duties, yet escape the harsher blows, make acute and balanced observers." I take it, however, that he would not confine the Comic Spirit to the drawing-room; if so, he does not know all of his familiar demons' haunts. The cultivated, the well-read—especially in the works of Meredith—have an easy avenue to his inner shrine, but folk of little education may find their way there, provided they are equipped at the start with a wise sympathy and a sense of humor, which they sharpen into the comic spirit by the observation of their fellow men. Mr. Santayana in his volume on America—I mean not *The Last Puritan* but another of his autobiographies—remarks that the best place for a philosopher to seek is not the chairmanship of the Department of Philosophy in a university. He should rather become custodian of umbrellas in a museum and there from his little throne watch his subjects as they come and go. Erasmus in one of his "Colloquies" says that Louis XI was fond of a talk with common folk, and Horace declares that the rich get sick of their tapestries now and then and like a poor man's simple table, like that at the Sabine farm. Such, beyond doubt, is the drawing-room that Meredith means, where, to quote his phrases, one attains high fellowship and becomes a citizen of the selecter world.[1]

Horace's father was one of these rich poor men. He started life as a slave, secured his manumission and was determined that his son should have a drawing-room. He took him from the country schools of Venusia to Rome and gave

[1] Meredith would hardly disagree with Fielding's observation (*Tom Jones,* Bk. XIV, 1): "I will venture to say the highest life is much the dullest, and affords very little humour or entertainment. The various callings in lower spheres produce the great variety of humorous characters."

him the best that his money could afford. His object was not to see that he went with the right people but to teach him how to see people aright. Horace's Roman masters were presumably excellent, but wiser than any of them was his father. It was the practice for Greek and Roman lads of good families to be escorted to and from school by a slave called a *paedagogus,* who carried his satchel and guided his path—a kind of intellectual caddy. The terms pedagogue, and pedagogy, have sometimes unpleasant connotations today. The ancient *paedagogus,* too, was sometimes, as Fielding would say, no better than he should be. He could unteach his young master the very arts that the disciplinarian behind the desk was strenuously trying to inculcate. But Horace's father played this part in a novel style. He taught his boy the observation of life. We may guess, perhaps, that he took him to Rome not merely to put him under the famous teachers there, but to give himself the chance to act as *paedagogus,* which would have been a curious rôle for him to play in the village of Venusia.

Horace, who like Beaumarchais never was ashamed of his father, the ex-slave, and never forgot his debt to him, gives us a pleasant account of these daily lessons.[1] They were object-lessons. Would you be like the needy Baius, who ran through his patrimony? Or Scetanus in love with a harlot, or Trebonius who had intrigues with married women and was caught *en flagrant délit?* Think what people say about such people, and think what they say about so-and-so, whose conduct is the kind to imitate. Such ethical teaching is profoundly impressive. It is the consideration not of virtues and vices abstractly, but of virtues and vices incarnate in certain people whom you like or dislike for the qualities that they show. It led for Horace to a course of self-examination

[1] *Serm.* I 4.

as rigid as that to which Marcus Aurelius submitted himself; one wonders why that practising Stoic had so little regard for Horace, who too was forming his character stroke by stroke, to swim at last, as his father put it, without a life-preserver. His aims were a better life, and pleasant friendships, and the art of not making a fool of himself. His father was no pedant in all this, but an elder brother, with a twinkle in his eye. For Horace tells us that his habit of free speech and his art of jest came from his father's teaching.[1]

When Horace went to Rome we know not, but he evidently got what we should call—or what our grandsires would have called—a college education there; for when he had learned to swim without a life-preserver, his father next sent him to Athens, where many young gentlemen of the time resorted to drink in letters and philosophy at the fountain-head. He was there when Brutus arrived in 44 B.C., not many months after the assassination of Caesar. Horace, who was born in 65 B.C., would be in his early twenties. Brutus was on his way to his province of Macedonia and Asia Minor. He entered the circle of the young Romans at Athens and aroused their interest in his cause. Well-versed in literature, oratory, and philosophy, Stoic in his thought and plainly Attic in his style, he commanded their respect. They enlisted in his army, Horace with the rest, and Horace was appointed a *tribunus militum*.

Horace is often depicted as a most unmartial man, despite his own praise of military training as a desirable experience for Roman youth.[2] He, of course, was not enamored of war, as seasoned soldiers are not. "Sweet is war," remarks Erasmus, "to those who have not tried it"—*dulce bellum in-*

[1] Ll. 103 ff.
[2] *Carm.* III 2.

expertis. But Horace must have had some inkling of military affairs; otherwise Brutus would not have given him so responsible a post. The duties of a *tribunus militum* varied in different periods of Roman history. They involved the superintendence of soldiers in camp, military drill, the inspection of sentries, with some attention to the commissariat and to medical service. They commanded on the march and in battle. Since there were six in a legion, and since a legion was the ancient regiment, we may perhaps call them Majors. At times a *tribunus militum* might command the whole legion, and whatever other functions Horace performed, he according to his own statement[1] did precisely that. We wonder perhaps that, however brilliant his intellectual attainments, a young man of no family and without experience in the field should be so honored, but that seems less surprising to those who saw young freshmen and sub-freshmen in the World War assume, after scant training, posts of responsibility and quit themselves like men.

I dwell on Horace's brief military career, since it is well to note that the mind that mastered the Comic Spirit was deep and serious and responsive to the call of duty. There is another aspect of his temperament of high importance for our theme. When, some thirteen years after the disaster at Philippi in 42 B.C., he welcomed with a convivial ode[2] the return of a companion in the war, he describes his own conduct on the field in words that to some serious-minded editors seem to demand a defense, or an apology. They point out politely that Horace naturally had to retreat with his army and that there is really nothing personal in his remark: "What time I left my little shield behind—not well." The late Professor Shorey, who was as eminent an Horatian as

[1] *Serm.* I 6, 48.
[2] *Carm.* II 7.

a Platonist, would rescue Horace in another way. He quotes three Grecian lyric poets, into whose society Horace had entered, Alcaeus, Anacreon, and Archilochus, who all had thrown their little shields away, and then he translates the verses of Archilochus:

> Some Thracian strutteth with my shield,
> For being somewhat flurried,
> I left it by a wayside bush,
> As from the field I hurried.
> A right good targe, but I got off.
> The deuce may take the shield!
> I'll get another just as good.
> When next I go afield.

With such authority from his brethren in the art, there was nothing for Horace to do but, with mock gravity, to throw his little shield away.

To understand this trait of mind in Horace, we must note the devotion to *exempla*—Chaucer's "olde ensaumples"—which ancient poets felt. The pattern was set for the writers of the love-elegy by Antimachus at the end of the fifth or the beginning of the fourth century. After the death of his sweetheart, Lyde, he wrote a dirge, or a poem of consolation, in which he retells the stories of heroic griefs to show how much deeper his own is. This theme was caught up by various elegists of the Hellenistic Age—Philetas, Hermesianax, Callimachus—and after them by Parthenius who came to Rome in 73 B.C. and by his intimacy with Gallus helped to start the Roman love-elegy on its course. Catullus with one magic word gave this habit a new turn. He does not compare; he identifies. By calling his loved one "Lesbia" he set her, with something of a metamorphosis for the infamous Clodia, in the circle of the Lesbian Sappho, and he set his own poetry there. Horace's phrase is no less magical, and no less audacious, though prompted not by passion but by the Comic Spirit.

It moves him next, his fancy once given rein, to imagine an heroic escape:

> But in a cloud fleet Mercury enwrapped me,
> And bore me all a-tremble through the foe.

All at once our plump little Horace becomes an Homeric warrior, saved not by Aphrodite, like Paris,[1] but by Mercury, the poet's god. This is Horace's happy invention—at least I think that nothing quite like this had appeared before—the fanciful and humorous mythologizing of his own experience. We shall see more of this trait anon.

On his return from Philippi Horace secured a pardon from the victors, but his estate was gone and his father had died. He had left his son a legacy, however, of untold wealth in that art of observation that he had taught him, not with a monetary but with a moral end in view, though later it proved that his seeking of the kingdom of poetry added unto him financial comfort for the remainder of his days. Meanwhile he secured a modest position as a clerk in the public treasury, which was located in the Temple of Saturn at the west end of the Forum. We can imagine him trudging there of a morning, noting humanity on the way and when he got there. The Roman business day began early, about the third hour after sunrise—eight o'clock, let us say, but if Horace is telling us the truth when he says he kept his bed till ten, he did not arrive at his post till late. Possibly he made amends in the fashion of Charles Lamb by going away early. I will not pause to defend Horace from an indictment for laziness, but observe merely that on one occasion at least he must have broken his rule; for it was nine o'clock when the bore caught him on the Sacred Way, proof to Horace, perhaps, that the early worm is caught by the first bird. But come to think of it, all this happened a

[1] *Il.* III 380: τὸν δ' ἐξήρπαξ' Ἀφροδίτη | ῥεῖα μάλ' ὡς τε θεός, ἐκάλυψε δ' ἄρ' ἠέρι πολλῇ.

bit later, when Horace had found his great patron and lived as he liked.

It is not certain that the first of Horace's poems took the form of satires. These he hardly regarded as poetry. His vein of poetry, and he had it from the start, found expression in another form, and one essentially lyric. His chief model was one of those Greek poets who had thrown away his little shield, Archilochus. Archilochus, who flourished in the middle of the seventh century, was a poet of a stormy life. He sang of battles, of love, and of wine, he wrote sharp invectives against his personal enemies, and again he rose to calm and contemplative heights from which he surveyed the uselessness of wealth and the pleasures of simplicity and moderation. He was a sturdy spirit, arming himself against the reverses of fortune which may come from the gods in an instant. He employed various metres in his verse—the elegiac couplet, the trochaic, and—perhaps his own invention —the sharply barbed iambic, which he shot out at those who wronged him. He combined the iambic verse of six feet in a couplet with one of four—the drawing of the bow and the discharge of the arrow. He had other combinations of longer verses with shorter. The extraordinary wealth of his art and his temperament is manifest even in the scanty fragments of his works that have survived. Had we all of them we should see even more clearly how his virile, and urbane, mind took possession of the virile, and urbane, mind of Horace.

Horace's first poem, one of his very earliest, at any rate, is the sixteenth *Epode*. This is no mere literary exercise prompted by Archilochus or other Greeks. It was prompted by the state of the times, which moved him deeply. Its probable date is 41 B.C., when his memories of Philippi were still vivid. The victors, Mark Antony and Octavian, had begun

their momentous quarrel, and Lucius Antony, the brother of Mark, was besieged by the troops of Octavian in Perugia.[1] Horace, though pardoned by Octavian, was hardly his ardent champion at the time. What distressed him was the prospect of another civil war. So gloomy was the outlook, that his only counsel for those who loved their country was to take ship in quest of the Happy Isles way out in Ocean. There only could peace of mind and of body be found, amid scenes that recall the Golden Age, which he paints in vivid colors.

In form, Horace's poem consists of couplets composed of a longer verse followed by a shorter, in the fashion of Archilochus. Here the longer is a dactylic hexameter and the shorter an iambic trimeter:[2]

> Altera iam teritur bellis civilibus aetas,
> Suis et ipsa Roma viribus ruit.
>
> Another age is worn with civil wars,
> And Rome by her own power falls.

The shorter verse in such a couplet is called by later writers on metric an *epodos,* a name extended, possibly not by Horace, to the couplet itself and the poem. It is a lyric verse, at any rate. The hexameters throughout are as highly polished as those that young Virgil had begun to write in his *Bucolics,* and more even, that is with fewer elisions, than those in which the *Georgics* and especially those in which the *Aeneid* are composed. The iambics correspondingly have none of the roughnesses of those of Roman comedy. They are chiseled into a complete simplicity. The art of lyric music is mastered.

[1] The visitor to Perugia today will see in its little museum a lead bullet shot from a sling by some Octavianian and inscribed: *Luci Antoni peristi* ("Lucius Antony, you're a goner"). Even if it did not hit a human body, it brought terror, maybe, to some human soul.

[2] Although this particular combination is not found in the fragments of Archilochus, he may possibly have used it in some poem now lost.

When Virgil read this poem, as he evidently did very soon, he knew that a poet of his own calibre had suddenly come upon the scene. He answered the pessimism of Horace in the following year, when the political atmosphere, in a fashion to which political atmospheres are wont, had changed. A new pact had been formed between Octavian, assisted by Maecenas, and Antony, assisted by Pollio, at Brundisium. Inspired by this happy event, Virgil wrote his Messianic eclogue in praise of Pollio, the consul of the year. He heralds a new Golden Age not at some far-off time and in some far-off place, but right before men's eyes in Italy, under the guidance of a prince and saviour, born in that selfsame year. Echoes of the language in which Horace depicts the Golden Age are unmistakable. Virgil is flinging a challenge to his new brother-poet.

Eminent scholars, I am aware, would give Virgil the priority, and see in Horace's poem an answer to Virgil's lavish optimism. If we put it late enough, say 38 B.C., this may be so; for fresh troubles were brewing in that year. I side with the equally eminent scholars who champion the view that I have just set forth.[1] For our present purpose, the matter is of little concern. In either case, Virgil saw in Horace's epode, whether or not he knew other poems by him, the marks of genius and of art. He won him for himself and he won him for his new hero Octavian by introducing him to his new patron Maecenas. This was about the year 37 B.C.

What other poems had Horace written by this time? We must reckon now with another influence that he could hardly escape, that of Catullus, who had been dead some dozen years when Horace returned from Philippi. Catullus was besides other things a poet of love and a poet of vigorous

[1] See my discussion in *The Magical Art of Virgil,* Harv. Univ. Press, 1931, pp. 100-113.

and at times nasty invective, and Horace does something with both themes in the *Epodes*. Some of the *Epodes* are later affairs. The little volume was published in 30 B.C., seven years after his introduction to Maecenas. The first of its poems is a dedication to Maecenas as he started on his way to the battle of Actium the year before; another (III) shows that he can banter most familiarly with Maecenas; another is a pæan of rejoicing over the victory at Actium (IX). An exhortation to his countrymen not to rush into another civil war (VII) is of uncertain date. A calmly convivial poem (XIII) anticipates the mood of a familiar ode (I 9) and the incident of broaching a jar sealed in the year of the poet's birth (III 21). Its metre, the Archilochian strophe, favors our previous suggestion that Horace selected a wide variety of themes, from the lyrics no less than the invectives, of his admired Archilochus.[1]

Other pieces, whether among the earliest or not, show the poet in love. Thus he blasts a parvenu (IV) and again a band of witches, headed by Canidia, who tortures a boy to death to make a love-philtre out of his entrails (V). He scorches Canidia again in a poem that indicates perhaps that he had been one of her lovers (XVII). He brands some poet who has libelled him and promises vigorous action (VI); and he sends to another, Maevius, the enemy of Virgil, an ironic letter of farewell to speed his ocean-voyage (X). He renounces a false sweetheart (XV) and assails some unnamed woman who combined a fondness of high literature with a bestial lust (VIII). It would seem that she had made approaches to Horace. If so, she made no more. It is somewhat refreshing to find that our placid Horace could hate and bite. Another foul answer is made to a woman of like kind (XII). This is no condescension to

[1] On the second Epode, see below p. 86.

coarseness for coarseness's sake. It is an excoriation of a coarse person.

These are Horace's early love-poems, all in Catullus's most bitter style, but without the sense of wounded pride and without the terrific exaggeration that robs Catullus's very nastiness of sincerity. On the other hand, there is none of the real Catullus, poet of a passion crystal-clear. Horace had not found a Lesbia—even if he made love to Clodia's daughter.[1] But there is one love-poem (XI) of a startling novelty, of which I venture to repeat a translation made some years ago:[2]

I care not now, oh Pettius, as of yore,
Verselets to write when Love is smiting sore,
Love, that selects me most of all the age
For tender boys and tender girls to rage.
Thrice has December laid the forests bare
Since for Inachia I've ceased to care.
'Tis mortifying, now, to write me down
An ass, dear me! the fable of the town.
How I detest these banquets to recall
When the fond lover was exposed to all,
By speechlessness and stupor now depressed,
Now blowing sighs out from his inmost chest.
"Aye, think of it! The poor man's brilliant wit
To cope with gold is utterly unfit,"
I'd moan to thee, when the immodest bowl
Opened at last the secrets of my soul.
"Had I a spark of righteous indignation
In this poor breast, I'd tear off my vexation,—
This poultice of false shame that heals no sore—
And free, I'd wage the unequal fight no more."
When so I spake, severe in virtue's praise,

[1] For a most engaging attempt to identify the object of Horace's early loves and hates, both personal and literary, see Tenney Frank's brilliant article in the *Classical Studies* presented to Edward Capps (Princeton, 1936) pp. 159–167. It is indeed thrilling to believe, if we can, that the "daughter fairer than her mother fair" (*Odes* I 16) is none other than the child of Catullus's Lesbia, Caecilia Metella. For the moment, I find it hard to reconcile this suggestion with the mood of the ode. Is Horace's really making a new proposal?

[2] "Ovid and the Spirit of Metamorphosis" in *Harvard Essays on Classical Subjects,* Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1912, p. 215.

Told to go home, I'd totter by strange ways
To hostile doors, alas, thresholds of stone,
That racked my legs and loins in every bone.
And now a lad, who boasts himself the peer
Of any little luscious damsel here,
The lad Lyciscus has made slave of me,
From whom nor kind advice of friends can free
Nor pointed insult, but some fresh affair,
Radiant girl or slim boy debonair
Tossing from out its knot his flowing hair.

Sed alius ardor aut puellae candidae
Aut teretis pueri longam renodantis comam.[1]

These verses do not seem like the record of actual experience. They are in the vein of Horace's later ode (III 10) in which our comfortable poet pictures himself in a most uncomfortable situation, singing a "closed-door" serenade out in the icy rain.[2] He really is laughing quietly at the romantic lover whose passion exposes him to ridicule. Horace laughs backward, perhaps, at Catullus, and he laughs prophetically forward at the tender romanticist Tibullus and the stormy romanticist Propertius. The breath of the Comic Spirit has blown away from his own mind the mists of the morbid and the sentimental. He has invented, or if he is not the inventor, I wish I knew who was, the art of ridiculing the third person in the guise of the first. It is the slim, feasting smile turned inwardly with ironic purpose. It is the ultimate purging of egotism. More of this invention anon.[3] Let us note that Horace had mastered it at the time when he was blowing Candidia to bits. We may also note that the Comic Spirit appears clad in a garb of decent poetry

[1] Incidentally we may note that in this poem the longer verse is the second, not the first, in the couplet. We may also note that the last of the *Epodes* (XVII) is all in iambic trimeters. The title "Epodes," whether devised by Horace or by some ancient editor, does not quite fit.

[2] Similar is his apology to Maecenas for not winding up his volume of *Epodes* (*iambi*) since he is so sore smitten with love (*Epode* XIV).

[3] Possibly the credit for it should go to Lucilius, though I find no certain evidence of it in his fragments.

and takes the part of the uncontrollable lover with a certain sympathy. This too, adds flavor to Horace's delicate satire.

The mood of this piece will serve as a transition to Horace's Satires. The word satire to us has a bitter tang. It is associated with sarcasm and irony and invective. We think primarily of our professional satirists, Dryden and Pope and Byron. But the word as the Romans used it, was of wider scope. It was used first, if Livy's account can be trusted,[1] of one of the native Italian farces that preceded the regular comedy of Plautus, Terence, and the rest, which owed its form mainly to the Greek. The word *Satura* is an adjective meaning "full," "stuffed." *Fabula Satura* would denote what the word "farce" does—a miscellany, a medley, a vaudeville show. Ennius wrote *Saturae* on a variety of subjects in a variety of metres; he had apparently taken the medley off the stage.

I will not plunge into the controversy on this matter in which various scholars in our country and abroad have engaged, some maintaining that Livy's description is essentially correct, some that he is uncritically following some patriotic scholar who had calmly made up a history of his country's literature on the outlines of the Greek. The idea is not incredible. One may see it displayed in mediaeval appropriations of the legend of Troy, or in the Roman outlines of Pope's sketch of English literature given in his adaptations of Horace.[2] Professor J. W. Duff, for whose history of Latin literature many teachers and students are permanently grateful, shows a notably conservative tendency in his recently published Sather Lectures, delivered at the University of California on the subject of Roman Satire.[3] It is sufficient for our purpose to remember that satire as a

[1] VII 2. [2] *Epist.* II 1.

[3] *Roman Satire, Its Outlook on Social Life,* University of California Press, 1936, pp. 13-18.

literary form is in the words of Quintilian a Roman invention—*tota nostra est*—and that just as Horace says, it has in its dialogue and its spirit a notable connection with comedy.

Two sorts of satire, at all events, existed before Horace appeared. There was the mode exhibited by Lucilius in the second century B.C., in which various metres, but most frequently the dactylic hexameter, were used, and in which a large element of invective appeared. There was also the Menippean satire, introduced by Varro, which like that of Ennius was a medley—but a medley of both prose and various sorts of verse—and which treated a wide range of subjects in a more genial tone. Menippus of Gadara was a Cynic philosopher who delivered little street-sermons—διατριβαί, somewhat in the spirit shown later by Lucian—which gave Varro the idea for his work. Both he and Lucilius may also have taken some of their matter and some of their manner from another moral satirist, the Scythian Bion of Borysthenes, whom Horace also knew. I would not imply that Lucilius was nothing but a vehement flagellator of vice. We must not forget that both Horace and Cicero call him *urbanus*. We are balked in our endeavor to estimate him by the fact that only fragments of his works have survived, but even from these fragments we can see that he was a wide-glancing observer of the comedy of life. He was Horace's great literary model for the works to which his temperament and his training now called him. Had we all of Lucilius before us, we could better trace his influence on Horace and find, I am convinced, that Horace was even more original than we think him.[1] As it is, we need have

[1] See the remarkable study by the late G. C. Fiske, *Lucilius and Horace: a Study in the Classical Theory of Imitation,* Madison, Wisconsin, 1920. It is a fascinating game, or picture-puzzle, to restore Lucilius from his pieces with Horace's help and then to examine Horace's imitation of Lucilius thus restored. The game has its hazards but it is worth playing.

no qualms about sources, but enjoy the satires of Horace, as we enjoy the epics of Homer, for what we find there.

In passing from the *Epodes* to the *Satires* we pass into a different world. Horace called these pieces not *"Saturae"* but *Sermones,* "talks," "causeries," or, if we translate the title very literally, "sermons"—for such they sometimes are. The term was not new with Horace. It is implicit in Lucilius's use of satire, and it goes back to those discourses on philosophy that Socrates held with his friends. And thereby hangs a tale, as we shall see.[1] We are invited, then, to a talk with Horace. He gives us a comfortable chair and fills us a cup of Falernian or plain Sabine. Had Horace known how to smoke, he would have offered us a good cigar. I sometimes think that the historians are all wrong and that Horace did smoke. At least I am certain that one cannot appreciate the finer flavors of tobacco who does not know something of the spirit of Horace. But Horace is ready for his talk. He tells us that it is informal, nearer prose than poetry,[2] and to emphasize its informality he conducts it in an informal style of hexameter verse, as remote from his lyric hexameters as the verse of comedy, which he also calls near neighbor to prose,[3] is from his lyric iambics. In its way, this conversational hexameter is as great a creation as the more elaborate verse. Here again Lucilius is the inventor and Horace the perfecter.[4]

What are the subjects of the ten short poems that he made into a book, and published in the year 35 B.C.? And what are the lights of high comedy that they reflect? I find four main themes in the little book—the poet's life, the poet's

[1] See Lecture II. p. 75, N. 2.

[2] *Serm.* I 4, 42: *sermoni propiora.*

[3] *Ibid.,* 45-48.

[4] To Horace, Lucilius is hasty and slovenly. (*Serm.* I 4; 10; II 1.) His own artlessness is most artful.

ideas, the poet's tribute to his masters and his friends—above all, to Maecenas, to Virgil, to Lucilius—and the son's tribute to his father. These several themes are often interwoven.

His life is one of calm contentment. He paints the pleasant picture[1] in illustration of a moral theme, the well-worn topic of nobility, which he treats in a novel way. Instead of pouncing on unworthy nobles and telling us, in the manner of Pope and of Juvenal, that

> Worth makes the man, the want of it the fellow,

he declares that he, son of the ex-slave, of whom he is never ashamed, of whom he is forever proud, enjoys so comfortable a lot that nothing could induce him to change it for that of the four hundred:

> For then I'd have to chase the almighty coin
> And pay more morning calls. For retinue
> I'd need a slave or two and ne'er could go
> Off to the country or abroad alone.
> I'd have to feed more lackeys and more nags
> And sport a Gallic chariot. But now
> My docktailed mule conveys me all the way
> To blest Tarentum, though his crupper's sore
> With my portmanteau and his flanks with me.
> Yet none can call me vulgar, Tillius, like you,
> When, noble praetor, on the Tibur road
> You are escorted by five haughty slaves
> Lugging a kettle and a demijohn.
> I lead a far more comfortable life,
> Worshipful senator. If comes the whim,
> I take a solitary stroll and ask
> The price of corn and beans and then steer by
> The sharpers in the Circus, and at dusk
> I roam the Forum, have my fortune told,
> Then home to supper, where three slaves, just three,
> Serve me pollenta with some leeks and peas.
> On the stone sideboard stand two cups, a ladle,
> A bowl, a cruet—plain Campanian ware.

[1] I. 6.

> And so to bed, with small anxiety
> Of stirring from it at the peep of day, . . .
> For there I stretch me till full ten o'clock.

In other words, Horace does not have to attend receptions, those sun-rise teas of the ancient Romans. In the twinkling of an eye, the lofty noble has become a comic character, and a social revolution has been effected without blood-shed, liquidation, or a five-year plan. Horace is more than anxious to "share the wealth," but he would not disturb the economic royalist in the process. For he holds the true wealth of contentment himself, and it is free for anybody who has the understanding to receive it.

Horace had attained the circle of Maecenas, but he is far from being Maecenas's slave. That he explains to the bore who caught him in the Forum at 9 A.M. Though making desperate attempts to escape, he treats the bore with that utter courtesy which hides an irony—that slim, feasting smile—too delicate for the bore to see. The latter is a poet, too, and anxious to be welcomed by Maecenas:

> For who can write more verses than can I,
> Or write more quickly?

He is ready to dance attendance to the great man and make himself solid with the slaves by timely bribes.

> That's not the way we live,

Horace answers quickly,

> No house is cleaner from such low intrigues.
> Nor am I harmed by one more wise or wealthy.
> Each man has his own place.

Horace knows his place, and is monarch in his little kingdom. The bore is at last hailed to court and Horace is rescued from an encounter as unpleasant as the battle of Philippi by another Homeric intervention, deliverance by the poet's god

Apollo. Meantime he has made another comic character, this time out of the social climber, he has asserted his own independence, and he has paid tribute to the patron who had received him on his own terms.

We meet Maecenas again in the journey that Horace took with him and other friends, Virgil included, to Brundisium.[1] Maecenas, with Cocceius Nerva and Fonteius Capito were on a serious errand. Pompey's son Sextus was giving trouble on the sea, Octavian and Antony were drawing apart again, and a new conference had been arranged with Antony at Athens for the autumn of 38 B.C. It was a moment for intense alarm. Horace voiced the general apprehension in a stirring epode (VII), but no consternation was exhibited by any of the party that went to see the ambassadors off at Brundisium. Horace tells of the bad food and the pesky mosquitoes. Maecenas plays tennis while Horace and Virgil take a nap. They witness a prize fight, which Horace describes in mock-epic—the style that Fielding develops so intensely in *Tom Jones*. He plans a *rendez-vous* with an Apulian maid, who fails to keep it. Over hills,[2] through rain, over muddy roads they go, till the long journey, and what Horace inaccurately calls the long story, end at Brundisium.

The Comic Spirit looks with approval on this unsentimental journey. For first, though unsentimental, it is full of the spirit of friendship. Comedy needs friendship—someone to laugh with as well as someone to laugh at. And Horace has sentiment if not sentimentality. His meeting with Virgil and two others of the party is accompanied by *complexus et gaudia*—hugs and hilarity. Horace, no less than Catullus,

[1] I 5.

[2] Horace is frankly physiological in his description (I 5, 82) but there is nothing nasty in the Rabelaisian laughter at his own expense, whether the incident really happened or was appropriated from Lucilius. See Fiske, *op. cit.*, p. 311.

has a warm Italian heart. His brother poets have the whitest souls—*animae candidae*—on earth.[1] And, he exclaims,

> Nothing, I vow, so long as I am sane
> Shall I find better than a pleasant friend.

Then again, the Comic Spirit likes to see even the serious moments of life faced not too seriously. Horace has no word to say on the grave prospect of a civil war. He belittles the altercation between the chieftains; for on the side of Octavian, he remarks, are Maecenas and Cocceius,

> Well-wont to reconcile estrangéd friends,

as they had done not long before at Brundisium. On the other side is Fonteius Capito, "every inch a gentleman" (*ad unguem factus homo*)—and so (notice the consequence) "Antonius has no better friend." Horace is something of a diplomat himself. Had Antony and Octavian talked it over at the Sabine farm—over wines furnished by Maecenas—there might have been no bloodshed. For Horace looks down from supermundane heights on human and national animosities that if seen in their true proportions in the merciless light of comedy would not prompt armies to take the field of war.[2] There is so much material today for an Horatian international comedy that I will not take the rest of this hour, or the next, to sketch the plot or call the roll of *dramatis personae,* among whom certain actors are so little skilled in their parts, so little read in Horace, that only an Homeric intervention may save our stage from tragedy.

To Maecenas the little book of satires is dedicated in its

[1] It is interesting to note that the two whom Horace mentions with his greatest friend—Plotius Tucca and Lucius Varius—were appointed Virgil's literary executors by Augustus after the poet's death to publish the unfinished *Aeneid.* The choice was appropriate.

[2] Virgil later (*Aen.* VI 832) in the same vein, calls Caesar and Pompey small boys, begging them not to fashion their spirits for big wars: *Ne Pueri ne tanta animis adsueseite bella.*

opening piece, in which Horace lays down the laws of a contented life. Most men are discontented, envy each the other's lot, not knowing how, in the wise words of the Anglican catechism "to do their duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call them"—and not knowing how, in the wise words of Lucretius, which Horace quotes,

To leave life's banquet like a well-fed guest.

The root of this evil is the love of money, avarice, and the sin that depends upon it, envy. The cure is the practice of moderation—

Est modus in rebus.

This is a moral discourse, developed with myth and anecdote:

Once was a miser in Minerva's town
Who said, "The crowd may hiss me, but at home
I can applaud myself, as I survey
The shining heap of ducats in my chest."

But on whom is the laugh? Well, take thirsty Tantalus, who

Would gulp the water that flows past his lips.

At *him* we smile—but have a care!

Mutato nomine de te
Fabula narratur.
With change of name, the legend is of you.

Horace goes on at some length, only to draw the rein tight at the end, in a manner dear to him, lest we should think we are listening to a Stoic sermon. That is what Horace has made us do, but the Comic Spirit can preach, if in the vein that Horace has just described, of telling the truth with a smile:

Ridentem dicere verum
Quid vetat?

This satire is not merely a dedication to Maecenas. It is a guide to everything that Horace was to write. Contentment, despite of wealth, moderation, and the Spirit of Comedy, these are the sources for him, and for us, if we will, of what President Eliot used to call the durable satisfactions of life.

The theme of moderation is also illustrated in the satire that follows (I 2), generally reckoned as one of the coarse bits that have survived from our poet's immaturity. He did not think so, else he would not have published it or left it in his papers. For nobody ever edited his writings more discriminatingly than Horace. Its subject is one for the fireside rather than the platform. I will say merely that it must be approached in the light of the moral standards of the age, which later ages have sometimes observed though fearing to proclaim them. I will make but three points, first that these standards are exactly those which Horace had learned from his father and which he presents in a satire not classed among his coarse immaturities,[1] secondly that in language Rabelaisian—for Horace is no lady—he has made a comic character of the adulterer, employing his method of ridiculing the third person in terms of the first and of mythologizing his own experience,[2] and thirdly that with the career of Catullus in mind, this is a highly moral satire and a tract for the times.

We next are presented (I 3) with a genial art of criticism, the proper way to examine our friend's defects with a purging effect on our own. Horace starts with the Stoic maxim that all sins are of like significance in upsetting the moral balance of the Stoic sage. He examines this paradox in the light of human evolution, drawing his history from

[1] I 4, 111 sq. See also *Carm.* I, 13, 17-20.
[2] I 2, 125 sq.

Lucretius, who was a guiding star to both him and his beloved Virgil at that time. The failure to distinguish between offenses runs counter to common sense.

> Does he who plucks his neighbor's cabbages
> Sin like the burglar who at dead of night
> Purloins the sacred emblems of the gods?

Or again:

> Shall pedagogues lay on a cow-hide whip
> For faults that merit but the light rattan?

The Stoic censor, in his turn, has become a comic character.

We may take a lesson, says Horace, from fond parents or fond lovers—and here again he glances at a passage in his Lucretius[1]—who metamorphose the defects of their darlings into beauties. Apply this principle to our friends. Is a certain somebody rather "near"? Call him economical. Does a silly person like to show off, he's just making himself agreeable to his friends. Another is brutally outspoken; call him courageous and candid. He may be hot-tempered; set him among the energetic. He's conceited, you say—oh, no, independent. He talks you to death—well, rather, interesting. So on *ad infinitum:* in fact, I have added one or two examples to Horace's. His precept is worth the attention of modern psychiatry. It will not harm us to apply it. People sometimes are what we make them; and in making them we make ourselves. While failing to see the mote in our neighbor's eye, we are lessening the beam in our own. Horace speaks of wens and warts, not beams and motes, but his meaning, and his humor, are precisely those of our Lord in the familiar injunction of the Gospel. The Comic Spirit laughs, meanwhile; for after all, we know those people well enough. And yet, do we? Whether we do or not, a comic *catharsis* of ourselves will do no harm.

[1] IV, 1157 ff.

In two of the satires that remain (I 4 and 10)[1] Horace reckons, as he must, with Lucilius, the master of his art. An ancient classic poet, or a modern classic poet, like Milton, even if he felt impelled to poetry by his private Muse, did not just sit down and write. What kind of poetry am I writing? he would ask. What are its rules and who are the artists that have made them? What have I to learn from them? He would no more think of writing satire before he learned what were its principles, than he would think of speaking Greek, or French, before he learned the language. There is an element of liturgy in classic poetry. The poet feels himself a priest, who echoes the sacred forms handed down from the past. But he is also a prophet, who speaks a new word to his generation, and an artist, who modifies the ancient rules till they express with a new beauty what he has to say. This is a more difficult originality to achieve than that of the poet who, turning his back on the past, pours forth his soul in his own fashion. Sometimes his art is as clear and simple as his feelings; sometimes it has no meaning.[2]

The ancient poet not infrequently begins with a kind of *apologia pro versibus suis*. He tells us what form he writes, what his motives are, and who his masters. Such is the character of Horace's first ode of his first book. In the *Satires,*

[1] Nos. 7 and 8 deserve a word. The former recounts an incident during Horace's campaign with Brutus. More important than the pun on the name of a certain Rex who figures in the story is the observation that a potent cause of war is the equality of the antagonists (a Hector and an Achilles), whereas if they are not quite equal, the inferior yields without a struggle (as Glaucus did to Diomede). In the Eighth Satire, Canidia and her intimates (all she-devils) are gathering herbs for a potion, when Priapus, the scare-crow god, frightens them away by a loud explosion. Priapean poems are traditionally coarse. The humor consists precisely in the use of such a setting for the "iambic" attack on Canidia.

[2] Fielding's little discourse in *Tom Jones* (Book XIV, 1): "An essay to prove that an author will write the better for having some knowledge of the subject on which he writes" humorously sets forth principles that apply to form as well as matter.

his method is less obvious; had the *Satires* been written after the *Odes,* we should call it a more mature method. For here the poet does not make his bow till the fourth poem of the book (and then it is not a very gracious bow), to his undoubted master, the great Lucilius. He takes him to task for his slovenly writing. He wrote too quickly and too much —two hundred verses standing on one leg. And he flung about too much abuse in the fashion of the writers of the old Greek comedy—

Eupolis atque Cratinus Aristophanesque poetae.

Horace had evidently been raked over the coals by the critics of the day. Some of the satires must have been circulated separately before they were bound in a book, and some, it may well be, had been discarded by their author before the book was bound. People had called Horace too censorious and had maintained that he had taken his matter from Lucilius and spoiled it in the taking. His reply is that his criticism of life, and of himself, came from a better source— the teachings of his father. This homage to the dear comrade of his boyhood, part of which I have already set forth to you, becomes the more profound when put in such a setting.

But Lucilius is not dismissed thus cavalierly before the book is done. This fourth satire must have gone the rounds and elicited another blast from the critics. In his farewell satire, the tenth, Horace pays tribute to the virtues of his Lucilius but repeats his objection to his art. He writes as a modern, one of a new school, proud of its achievements and flushed with an energy to do yet better things. A truce to Demetrius, Tigellius, and all their house. Enough for him the praise of Virgil, Varius, Maecenas, and his other friends, of whom he names a dozen and leaves some unnamed. He

mentions those who had to try to follow in Lucilius's steps, nor has he the hardihood, despite all he has said, to wrest the crown from the inventor's brow. But the air is full of hope. Horace is of the moderns, and though not blind to the virtues of the past, he hails the advent of a new and better art. He has fought his way to the front. The freedman's son has entrance to the drawing-room.

"Go, boy," he says to his amanuensis in the closing line, "and quickly sign my little book."

I have called this first lecture "The Start," but if Horace had died just after the little book had been signed, it would remain the monument of a well-rounded life, kept genial and sane by the Spirit of Comedy. If this is "The Start," what can "The Attainment be? That will be the theme of the following lecture.